

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6806
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 CAPE TOWN 0336

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PORG, WA, SF, UN,
SUBJECT: NAMIBIA: SOUTH AFRICA REASSESSES

1. SUMMARY: THE SAG APPEARS TO BE REASSESSING THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF PURSUING FURTHER THE WESTERN PROPOSAL ON NAMIBIA OR PROCEEDING SOON TO AN INTERNAL SETTLEMENT. THERE MAY BE NOTHING MORE TO THIS APPEARANCE THAN A RENEWED EFFORT TO AVOID RESPONSIBILITY FOR AN IMPASSE. THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS AND RECONSIDERATION OF THE FACTORS INVOLVED, HOWEVER, MAY HAVE FAVORABLY ALTERED SOMEWHAT SAG CALCULATIONS. AT THE SAME TIME, MOVEMENT TOWARD AN INTERNAL SETTLEMENT IN RHODESIA AND SPECULATIONS ABOUT A SHIFT IN US STRATEGY IN RESPONSE TO DEVELOPMENTS IN THE HORN, MAY HAVE LED THE SAG TO BELIEVE THAT THE INTER-
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NATIONAL DYNAMICS AFFECTING THE NAMIBIAN PROBLEM ARE CHANGING.
END SUMMARY.

2. IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING FOREIGN MINISTER BOTHA'S ABRUPT DEPARTURE FROM THE PROXIMITY TALKS IN NEW YORK ON FEB. 12, THERE WAS A BRIEF PERIOD WHEN THE COMMON IMPRESSION IN SOUTH AFRICA, FED BY THE MEDIA (CAPE TOWN 274), WAS THAT THE NAMIBIA TALKS WERE

IN A STATE OF NEAR COLLAPSE. BOTHA'S COMBATIVE PERFORMANCE IN HIS "FACE THE NATION" INTERVIEW, WHICH WAS REPLAYED TWICE ON SABC-TV, ENHANCED THE FEELING OF CRISIS. BUT HIS STATEMENTS ON HIS RETURN TO SOUTH AFRICA, FEB. 14 (CAPE TOWN 287) AND SUBSEQUENT MEDIA TREATMENT OF THE ISSUE STRESSED THAT SOUTH AFRICA HAD NOT GIVEN UP AND THE PROCESS WAS CONTINUING. BOTHA EMPHASIZED THAT DEFINITIVE DECISIONS WOULD AWAIT FURTHER EXCHANGES WITH THE FIVE AND CONSULTATIONS WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT AND WITH PARTIES INSIDE NAMIBIA.

3. ALTHOUGH OVER THE PAST TEN DAYS THERE HAVE BEEN NUMEROUS OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PRIME MINISTER TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT IN THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES, HE HAS AVOIDED SUBSTANTIVE COMMENT. LIKEWISE, BRAND FOURIE DEALT WITH THE CLARIFICATIONS WHICH THE CAPE TOWN FIVE PRESENTED LAST WEEK IN A SERIOUS AND BUSINESS-LIKE MANNER (CAPE TOWN 305 AND 315), URGING THAT THE FIVE MAKE NO FINAL DECISIONS BEFORE THE SAG HAD HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXAMINE THE FIVE'S REACTIONS TO HIS OBSERVATIONS ON THE CLARIFICATIONS. IN A CONVERSATION WITH ME ON FEB. 21 (CAPE TOWN 323), FOURIE UNDERScoreD HIS DESIRE TO MAINTAIN MOMENTUM AND KEEP THE TALKS GOING. IN THE LAST FEW DAYS, OBVIOUSLY INSPIRED ARTICLES (CAPE TOWN 318 AND 324) HAVE APPEARED IN SOUTH AFRICAN PAPERS QUOTING "INFORMED SOURCES" TO THE EFFECT THAT (1) THE SAG IS STILL IN FULL PURSUIT OF AN INTERNATIONALLY NEGOTIATED AGREEMENT; (2) BOTHA'S WALKOUT IN NEW YORK PROMPTED SOME SIGNIFICANT ADJUSTMENTS IN THE WESTERN PROPOSAL; (3) COMPROMISES ON THE MAIN

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STICKING POINTS ARE POSSIBLE; AND (4) SINCE THE PROXIMITY TALKS, SWAPO'S POSITION HAS ONCE AGAIN HARDENED.

4. AT THE SAME TIME PRO-SAG EDITORIALS CONTINUE TO EXPOUND ON THE ALLEGED PRO-SWAPO INCLINATIONS OF THE WEST AND THE UN AND THE REASONABLENESS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN POSITION. IN HIS RECENT LONDON TIMES INTERVIEW, VORSTER REFLECTED THESE VIEWS (CAPE TOWN 308)

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5. THE OVERALL EFFECT OF THE SAG POSTURE SINCE BOTHA'S RETURN IS TO ENCOURAGE THE VIEW ABROAD AND AT HOME THAT, WHILE SWAPO REMAINS ESSENTIALLY UNFORTHCOMING, SOUTH AFRICA IS IN ALL SERIOUSNESS SEEKING ACCOMMODATION ON THE BASIS OF THE WESTERN PROPOSAL AND THAT--PERHAPS MORE THAN ANY TIME IN THE PAST--AGREEMENT IS POSSIBLE.

6. WHETHER THE SOUTH AFRICANS ARE ACTUALLY ANY CLOSER TO ACCEPTING THE PACKAGE TODAY THAN THEY WERE TWO WEEKS AGO IS UNCERTAIN. AT A MINIMUM, IT IS CLEAR THAT THEY WISH TO ERASE THE ADVANTAGE BOTHA'S GAMBIT IN NEW YORK GAVE TO SWAPO IN THE PUBLIC RELATIONS CONTEST. IT COULD, HOWEVER, BE MORE THAN A HOT POTATO GAME. THE PROCESS

OVER THE PAST 10 MONTHS HAS NOW BROUGHT THE SOUTH AFRICANS
TO THE POINT WHERE THEY THEMSELVES PORTRAY THEIR DIFFERENCES
WITH THE WESTERN PROPOSAL(AS DISTINCT FROM THEIR DIFFERENCES WITH
SWAPO) AS BASICALLY MATTERS OF DEGREE RATHER THAN PRINCIPLE.
ASIDE FROM THE DESIRE TO AVOID THE ONUS OF RESPONSIBILITY
FOR COLLAPSE OF THE FIVE'S INITIATIVE, FACTORS WHICH MAY
CONCEIVABLY HAVE ENCOURAGED THE SAG TO CONTINUE WITH THE
TWO-TRACT APPROACH AT LEAST FOR A WHILE LONGER INCLUDE:

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 CAPE TOWN 0336

EXDIS

--SWAPO'S AGREEMENT TO THE PRINCIPLE OF SOUTH AFRICAN
TROOP PRESENCE THROUGH THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, ALBEIT SUBJECT TO
CONDITIONS UNACCEPTABLE TO THE SAG;

--THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF IMPROVED CHANCES THAT SHIPANGA AND OTHER
SWAPO DETAINEES MAY BE RELEASED AND RETURNED TO NAMIBIA,
THUS COMPLICATING SWAPO'S POLITICAL POSITION;

--A RELATED MORE OPTIMISTIC CALCULATION OF THE DTA'S
ELECTORAL PROSPECTS UNDER THE WESTERN PLAN;

--THE LIKELY SUPPORT FROM CHURCHMEN AND OTHER COMMUNITY LEADERS IN NAMIBIA FOR THE WESTERN PROPOSAL; AND

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--NOW THAT THE END OF THE PROCESS MAY BE NEAR, A MORE SERIOUS, LONG-TERM LOOK AT THE PROSPECT OF AN ESCALATING AND INCREASINGLY COSTLY MILITARY EFFORT IN NAMIBIA AS REFLECTED IN RECENT GUERRILLA ACTIVITY.

7. THESE FACTORS COULD FAVORABLE AFFECT THE SAG'S BASIC CALCULATION OF THE RISK OF A SWAPO ELECTORAL VICTORY IN NAMIBIA AS WEIGHED AGAINST THE BENEFITS OF AN INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT.

8. IN ADDITION, THERE ARE OTHER ELEMENTS OUTSIDE THE IMMEDIATE NAMIBIAN CONTEXT WHICH MAY NOW BE INFLUENCING SOUTH AFRICA'S ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION. THEY PERCEIVE AMBIVALENCE IN THE WESTERN REACTION TO THE INTERNAL SETTLEMENT DEVELOPMENTS IN RHODESIA AND IMPROVED CHANCES THAT RHODESIAN EVENTS WILL UNFOLD IN A WAY WHICH WILL AVOID SANCTIONS AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA IN CONNECTION WITH THAT ISSUE. IF THAT PROVES TO BE THE CASE, THERE IS NO LONGER VALIDITY TO THE ARGUMENT THAT THERE IS NO USE IN WORRYING ABOUT SANCTIONS OVER NAMIBIA IF THERE ARE TO BE SANCTIONS OVER RHODESIA ANYWAY. THIS WOULD ENCOURAGE GREATER CAUTION IN PLAYING OUT THE PROCESS ON NAMIBIA. PROBABLY MORE TELLING, HOWEVER, WOULD BE THE PERCEPTION THAT, IF SMITH CAN SLIP BY WITHOUT SANCTIONS BEING INCURRED, PERHAPS SOUTH AFRICA CAN DO THE SAME IN NAMIBIA.

9. AT THE SAME TIME, THERE IS DEVELOPING SPECULATION IN SOUTH AFRICA SUGGESTING THAT THE PERIOD OF THE "FAILURE OF US WILL" IN DEALING WITH THE SOVIETS IN AFRICA MAY BE COMING TO AN END. SOME OF THE INSPIRED MEDIA COMMENTARY HERE, INCLUDING TODAY'S (FEB. 22) SABC EDITORIAL (REPORTED JOHANNESBURG SEPTTEL), HAS LINKED THE OUTLOOK IN NAMIBIA TO THE BUILDING CRISIS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA. THE SOUTH AFRICANS TEND TO BELIEVE A

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US-SOVIET CONFRONTATION IN THAT AREA COULD CHANGE THE DYNAMICS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS REGARDING SOUTHERN AFRICA, INCLUDING NAMIBIA AS WELL AS RHODESIA. WE CAN BE SURE THAT VORSTER AND BOTHA HAVE FOLLOWED WITH INTEREST RECENT US NEWSPAPER REFLECTIONS, PROMINENTLY REPORTED HERE, ON SIGNS THAT US POLICY IS SHIFTING TOWARD MORE FORCEFUL

COUNTERING OF SOVIET AND CUBAN INTERVENTION IN AFRICA.

10. THESE DEVELOPMENTS, TOGETHER WITH THE FACTORS POSSIBLY ENCOURAGING A FAVORABLE SOUTH AFRICAN REASSESSMENT OF THE WESTERN PROPOSAL ON NAMIBIA, COULD WELL BE IMPORTANT IN INCLINING THE SAG TOWARD AVOIDANCE OF DEFINITIVE REJECTION OF THE PROPOSAL. THERE SEEMS TO BE A FAIR PROSPECT THAT THE SOUTH AFRICANS WILL MAINTAIN AT LEAST THE APPEARANCE OF INTEREST IN THE WESTERN PROPOSAL FOR A TIME. WHETHER THEY ARE PREPARED TO DELAY MUCH LONGER THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF A DATE FOR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS WE CANNOT SAY, BUT IT IS PERHAPS SIGNIFICANT THAT THEY HAVE NOT RECENTLY BEEN URGING ON US THE NECESSITY OF SUCH A STEP. CONCEIVABLY, THEY MIGHT TAKE SUCH ACTION WHILE STILL PROFESSING A WILLINGNESS AND DESIRE TO CONTINUE PURSUIT OF THE WESTERN INITIATIVE.
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